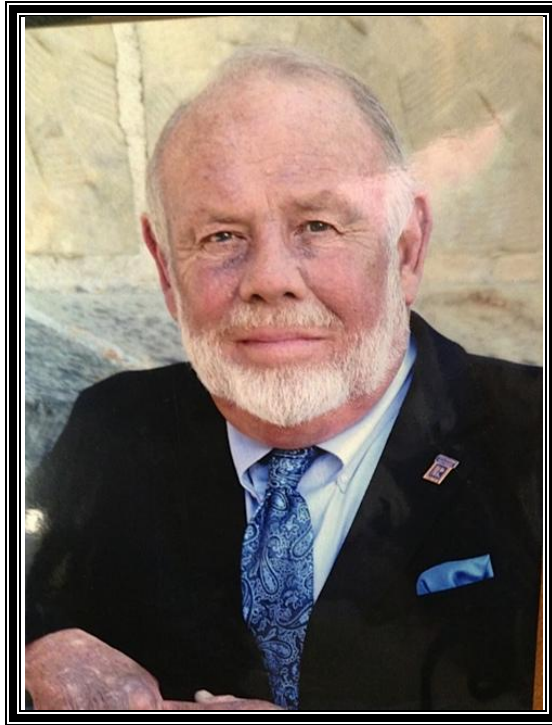


Remembering Sparky:

James Edwin Caldwell (1944-2014), Campbell High School Class of 1962

Kurt Ritter, '62



This is the picture of Jim Caldwell as we entered the Unity Church of Santa Barbara
Photo courtesy of Fred Nooteboom

Sparky passed away on August 2, 2014 at the age of 70 years in Santa Barbara, CA, where he had pursued his career in real estate during the past 20 years. His obituary is available at <http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/newspress/obituary.aspx?n=james-edwin-caldwell&pid=172141276>

My personal remembrance presented here is based upon our time as classmates at Campbell High School from 1958 to 1962, rather than upon his subsequent career.

His nickname tells all about James Caldwell: He was a spark among his classmates—unfailingly up-beat; eager for new challenges; and a person who saw the positive, the exciting, the humorous in almost any situation. Other than attributing it to his personality, I do not know specifically how James Caldwell came to be called Sparky. But it was not something applied to him against his will. He embraced it fully. “Sparky” was how he signed each of his photos and comments in the *Oriole* yearbooks. It was probably his openness to new adventures that caused him to join the new “Speech and Debate Commission” at the start of our junior year in the fall of 1960. He was soon winning awards representing Campbell High at speech tournaments held around the Santa Clara Valley and as far north as San Francisco. For both the fall and spring semesters of our senior year, he served as the “Commissioner” for Speech & Debate.

During the summer of 1961 Sparky and I were among a small delegation from Campbell High who participated in Northwestern University’s National High School Institute on Speech & Debate. Living in dormitories open to us because only a small fraction of the university’s students attended in the summer, we spent about six weeks on the beautiful campus located on the shore of Lake Michigan just north of the second largest city in the U.S.—Chicago. During those weeks we had intense instruction and practice in public speaking, the discussion of public issues, and debating important political questions, as well as attending cultural events both on campus and in Chicago.

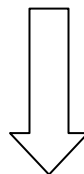
The Campbell High delegation had arrived on campus early, so we had several days free to discover how to ride the “El” (elevated train) into Chicago, where we excitedly pursued our passions—particularly restaurants featuring large, inexpensive steaks, and ornate movie theatres featuring inexpensive matinees showing the most recent film releases—movies that would not reach the Campbell Theatre nor even the San Jose movie houses for many months, if not years. For most of us, it was our first great adventure undertaken thousands of miles away from our parents. It was a glorious time, and no one enjoyed it more than Sparky. We returned to Campbell feeling very worldly and grown up—at ages that ranged from 15 to 17 years.

As juniors, Sparky and I had focused our speech activities on individual speaking contests where we delivered formal public speeches: either famous, historic speeches (“declamations”) or original orations of our own composition. Armed with our experiences at Northwestern University, we started our senior year in the fall of 1961 committed to competing in debate contests against far more experienced debaters representing rival high school. It was hard and humbling. We learned by trial and error—lots of trials and lots of errors, debate by debate. I discovered that I actually did not know much about debating, despite our summer at Northwestern University. If Sparky shared these doubts, he never revealed it to me. Perhaps drawing on his experience on Campbell High’s athletic teams (football, baseball, tennis), he understood that all of us in speech & debate—from the brand-new freshmen to the seemingly self-assured seniors—were a team. He understood that a positive attitude and the ability to bounce back after losing another debate or speaking competition were keys to sustaining the team’s morale and eventually to achieving success. He helped to keep us believing that we could all become good debaters and speakers. As our senior year progressed, we did start winning debates and eventually we helped Campbell High win a “sweepstakes” award at a tournament.

Sparky’s enthusiasm and commitment motivated me, and I suspect other members of the Class of ’62 who were on the speech & debate team—people like Jack Van Sambeek, Gordon Kubota, and Paul Morey among others. Sparky Caldwell helped us build a foundation on which our younger teammates would build. Less than two years after our class graduated, Campbell High won the 1964 California State Speech & Debate Championship. A keystone of that achievement was that two Campbell students won the state debate championship.

Sparky exemplified the “can do” attitude that I remember as characteristic of Campbell High. I am glad that we were high school classmates and friends.

Scroll down to see more photos of Jim





Kurt Ritter, Jack Van Sambeek, James "Sparky" Caldwell, Gordon Kubota
50 year reunion 2012



Paul and Helen Morey with Sherry and Fred Nootboom
after Jim Caldwell's Memorial Service, August 23, 2014.

Jim will be missed.

